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AUTHOR Figler, Clare Spector
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ABSTRACT

A study utilized a family systems approach, in which two groups of mainland based Puerto Rican families were interviewed, to compare Puerto Rican families whose children have identified handicaps (N=14) and Puerto Rican families whose children do not have handicaps (N=14). Investigated were the quality and quantity of stresses which impinge upon the families: the quality and quantity of coping strategies which are utilized to deal with the stresses: and the similarities and differences which exist relative to the stresses, the coping strategies, and the type of family (handicapped or nonhandicapped). Among conclusions were that the immediate and extended family relationships among most of the families were found to be generally strong and caring: members of the handicapped group were more disillusioned with marriage, childrearing, and parenting roles: and the employment status of the adults in the families was a crucial factor affecting the families' functioning. Considered are the implications for practice, policy, and special education. Tables are provided which present information on the generalized and composite features of Puerto Rican life (predominant values, social roles, and societal features): the Puerto Rican in the mainland (education, housing, economics): and aspects of Puerto Rican return migration. (SB)

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# PUERTO RICAN FAMILIES WITH AND WITHOUT HANDICAPPED CHILDREN*

by

Clare Spector Figler

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This paper summarizes a study which focused upon the variety of stresses and coping strategies experienced by two groups of Puerto Rican families living on the mainland United States. A comparison was made of Puerto Rican families whose children did not have identifiable special needs with Puerto Rican families whose children did have identifiable special needs.

## Plan of Paper

Because of the significant impact which historical events has had upon most levels of life among Puerto Ricans, as a group, at least a cursory mention about this impact is felt to be a necessary component in this paper.

The following are the topics which are included in this report

I. Puerto Rican's unique story
II. Generalized overview about Puerto Rican life
    --In the Mainland
    --Cyclical Migration
III. Summary of study
IV. Conclusions
V. Implications for practice, policy, and special education.

## I. Puerto Ricans' Unique Story

Foremost in the hearts and minds of the families interviewed in the study -- whether or not the families had handicapped children -- is their strong identity as Puerto Ricans. Although this group of Latinos share the rich Hispanic heritage (language, religion, social system) with many other cultures, Puerto Ricans have a historically unique story to tell. The story is often unappreciated and minimized not only by the society at large but often by other Hispanic groups. Without detailing an extensive historical treatise, a brief overview is presented.

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* The material in this paper is derived from A Comparative Study of Puerto Rican Families With and Without Handicapped Children, Clare S. Figler, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1979.

The historically unprecedented speed of Puerto Rico's industrialization at the hands of the political decision-makers of the United States, beginning in the thirties, permanently changed the character of the social picture and the ideals of the Island's people. The complicated plan of industrialization, one result of which was "Operation Bootstrap" of the 1950's, in effect, mandated that a portion of the Island's people needed to spend a portion of their lives on the mainland. Initially, most Puerto Ricans settled in New York, although the wave of settlements into other mainland communities expanded and continues to do so.

The point to be emphasized is that, contrary to stereotypical misconceptions harbored by many in the middle class society, the notion that life on the mainland community is "better" than life on the Island is not totally accurate. Sometimes it is often it is not. The uprooting of Puerto Ricans to the mainland is disruptive for many of the families. Even among families who are strong, well-motivated, and have a high level of personal skills, the dream of returning to the Island is strong. Often the dream is an idealized goal which cannot be fully realized. At any rate, that most Puerto Ricans harbor the dream of "returning home again" indicates that life on the mainland is not always ideal. A part of every mainland-based Puerto Rican either remains on or longs to return to the Island.

Neither can one accept the fact that life for Puerto Ricans on the mainland community is totally frustrating. There are many satisfactions. Often, employment opportunities are found, education is better, learning of another language --English-- is facilitated, medical and social services are more abundant and often better. But, these benefits are often achieved at great cost. Families are separated, children's education is segmented, young and old are often traumatized by the process of migrating and assimilating.

Puerto Ricans on the mainland, and certainly on the Island, are, like other groups, diverse. Some are rich, some are poor, some are educated, some are uneducated, some are strong, some are weak, some are white, some are brown, some are black. The host Anglo society is often forgetful of this important diversity. It devotes a considerable amount of time, effort, and money to programs which do not recognize this diversity about Puerto Ricans.

## II. Generalized Features of Puerto Rican Life

Because the scope of this paper does not allow ample space in which to present an extended discussion about Puerto Rican life on either the Island or on the mainland, a consolidated version about this areas is presented in table/outline form. Tables 1, 2, and 3 provide important information relative to Puerto Rican life.

Table 1

Generalized and Composite Features of Puerto Rican Life

| | |
|---|---|
| Historical | Taino Indian, native inhabitants. Colonized by Spain. Introduction of African Slave culture. Genetic and cultural fusion rather than aggressive declaration of independence. Acquired by United States through treaty negotiation with Spain. Annexation as Commonwealth of United States. Changing society with minimal agricultural progress. Emerging numbers into middle class. Completely and permanently industrialized in 15 years. |
| Predominant Values | Sense of personal dignity. Respect critical and supersedes love; continuous attempt to seek personal friendships based on confidence. Belief in an ordered supernatural. Family values and obligations foremost. Cultural values source of conflict and stress in mainland community. Flexible time; support derived through personal relationships. |
| Family System | Minimum communication between spouses. Traditional family value ideals permeates through all classes. Cult of virginity for daughters and new brides. Differential treatment of children based on sex. Machismo ideals expected of sons and husbands. Source of stress and conflict in mainland community. Consensual unions adhere to strong family responsibility. |
| Social Roles | Double sexual standard, generally class-related. Child-rearing reflects double standard. Defined role expectations is source of conflict and stress in middle-class oriented mainland community. |
| Social Dynamics | Need for personal interaction. Defined class boundaries. Privacy minimally valued. Opinions of social community critically important. Strong sense of personal community. More social activism apparent in second, third generation Puerto Ricans in mainland. Social support networks from families and neighbors expected, cherished, and personal. Minimal availability of personal support networks is source of stress in mainland community. |

Table 1 (continued)

Generalized and Composite Features of Puerto Rican Life

| | |
|---|---|
| Language | Spanish. Much sentimental attachment to primary language in mainland communities, where color boundaries are rigidly enforced. Much stress and conflict at initial states of assimilation process. Bilingual programs often effective coping strategy for children. Possibility of return migration demands bilingual proficiency. |
| Religion | Predominantly Catholic, but personal involvement, rather than traditional. Personal identification and cherishing of saints. Catholicism is mostly ceremonial, related to Virgin Mary, Saints, symbolic. "Womb to tomb" Catholicism. Integration of African, Western religions and Spiritist Pentecostal groups. Pentecostal groups effective personal systems of support. |
| Racial | Gentle intermingling of color-based differences. On Island, softer boundaries and wide range of color lines coexist. Exclusion and inclusion based on color not as intense and emotional an issue among Puerto Ricans. Racial conflicts based on color a source of considerable strain in the mainland community. |
| Societal Features | Class-structured society, more traditional and less mobile than mainland society. Rapid change occurring on Island. Generally gay, music is enjoyed, overt expression and declaration of feelings. Ethnicity permeates all class lines. Strong national-ethnic feeling. All Puerto Ricans feel Puerto Rican. |
| Migration Assimilation | Migration to and from mainland involving one fourth of Island population. Migration internal and external. Return migration an on-going process. A family endeavor; migrants usually younger adults who seek betterment for family. Migrants better educated than average Island Puerto Ricans but less so than average for mainland. Most pronounced concentration on Mainland is in New York. Puerto Rican communities have established and grown in other urban centers. Mainland Puerto Ricans are urban dwellers. Middle-class American values of mainland which stress competition a source of conflict since Puerto Ricans value cooperative behavior. Assimilation and acculturation most difficult, since new migrants continuously are establishing themselves. Prevalence and accessibility of return migration differentiates Puerto Rican's migration patterns from other groups. |

Table 2

The Puerto Rican in the Mainland

| | |
|---|---|
| Statistical Data | 1. Second largest Hispanic group in United States.<br>2. Significantly younger group than national average; predominantly involved with school-age children.<br>3. One fourth of all Puerto Ricans live in mainland; not the same fourth because of cyclical move of different people.<br>4. Close to two million Puerto Ricans in mainland. |
| Family | 5. Size of family generally larger than average American family; this predisposes greater involvement with public assistance.<br>6. Scattering of extended family members in various sections of the city in different housing complexes.<br>7. Pervasive overcontrol of children in response to actual and perceived danger of the neighborhood.<br>8. Weakened family supportive networks because of dispersion of extended family. |
| Education, Employment | 9. More educated than Island standards but less educated than mainland standards.<br>10. Less educated than other Hispanic groups.<br>11. Underrepresented in high schools and colleges.<br>12. School drop-out rate significantly high.<br>13. Typical employment that of service workers, operatives, manual laborers.<br>14. Underemployed. Victims of downward mobility, whereby quality of employment decreases because better jobs not readily accessible to inner city dwellers.<br>15. More consistently unemployed than all whites and non-whites.<br>16. Employment more subject to layoffs, seasonal status. |
| Community, Housing | 17. Mainland community is heterogenous ... composed of established members and recent arrivals.<br>18. More recent arrivals prefer Puerto Rican neighborhoods.<br>19. Increased settlement in cities other than New York (Boston, Hartford, Philadelphia).<br>20. Those in smaller cities appear better adjusted, more tranquil, and are treated as more of a novelty by the society.<br>21. Prefer to live near schools, hospitals, stores, in areas which are safe from drug traffic and other crimes. |

Table 2 (continued)

The Puerto Rican in the Mainland

| | |
|---|---|
| Community, Housing (continued) | 22. Paths of migration within urban city usually determined by lines of transportation, and availability of housing.<br>23. Dwellings typically rented.<br>24. More assimilated and established Puerto Ricans venture out to neighborhoods which are not settled by other Puerto Ricans.<br>25. Ideal preference for two- or single-family homes rather than public housing.<br>26. Cold climate considered initially stressful. |
| Language, Politics, Economics, Stresses | 27. Language difficulties almost universally felt to be most obvious problem.<br>28. Underrepresentation politically; Puerto Ricans lumped with other minority groups in governmental representation.<br>29. Minimal overt political demonstration.<br>30. Poorer than mainland population, but not poorest of Island population.<br>31. Below all other Hispanic groups socio-economically.<br>32. Suffer stresses of powerlessness related to poverty.<br>33. Overrepresented in crime and drug statistics.<br>34. Generally a disadvantaged group in the mainland. |
| Values, Religion | 35. Experiences conflict between American and Puerto Rican cultural values: personal values, expectation of respect from children, machismo, double sexual standard, and others.<br>36. Religion does not play a crucial role in the assimilation of Puerto Ricans.<br>37. Supportive religious experiences provided in Pentecostal, Spiritist, and in more traditional religions such as Catholicism.<br>38. Pentecostal has been active in promoting a sense of personal identity to Puerto Ricans.<br>39. Spiritualism a common phenomenon often interwoven with more traditional practice. |

Table 3

Aspects of Puerto Rican Return Migration

1. Option to return readily available.
2. United States citizenship of Puerto Ricans minimizes re-entry problems (passports, visas unnecessary).
3. Disillusionment with mainland life promotes return to Island.
4. Commitment to mainland community and to assimilation weakened or interrupted.
5. Children's educational process interrupted.
6. Children's education scattered between the Island and mainland; therefore, maintenance of primary language is relevant.
7. History of maintenance of family ties with Island sector. Visits, vacations, telephone conversations frequent.
8. "Typical" return migrant stays less than 10 years in mainland.
9. Migration to mainland often seen as a temporary state.
10. Non-Puerto Ricans perceive return migration as an expected pattern about Puerto Ricans.
11. Migration to mainland part of a more general movement pattern on Island away from rural areas.
12. Marriage and family formation often coincide with migration.
13. Difference in income between Island and mainland a major incentive for migration, and deterrent to return.
14. Negative aspects of Island life tend to be minimized; negative aspects of mainland life tend to be maximized.
15. Social networks perceived to be anchored in Puerto Rico. Island news and political/social developments continue to be relevant.
16. Return migrants who are socially and educationally proficient serve as social changers and activists on Island.
17. The stronger the social and psychological ties to Puerto Rico, the more predisposed migrants are to return to Island, irrespective of financial factors.

Table 1 includes brief summaries about history, values, family systems, social roles, social dynamics, language, religion, racial lines, societal features, and migration/assimilation issues.

Table 2 consolidates information about the mainland experiences of Puerto Rican families. Again, those issues which influence the quality of life of mainland-based Puerto Rican families are summarized. Within the framework of this paper --specifically, the comparison of families with and without special needs children -- the information presented in Table 2 is particularly relevant.

Table 3 deals specifically with the aspect of return migration among Puerto Ricans. In the annals of migration experiences, particularly those relevant to the United States, the cyclical migration process of Puerto Ricans (from Island to mainland and back) is a unique occurrence.

## III. Summary of Study

The study utilized a family systems approach, in which two groups of mainland-based Puerto Rican families were interviewed. The comparison of Puerto Rican families whose children have identified handicaps (Handicapped Group) and Puerto Rican families whose children do not have handicaps (Non-Handicapped Group) was linked to a model involving the personal-level, the family-level, and the community-level systems.

The sample is composed of 28 families, fourteen of whom have children with identified educational, behavioral, or physical needs (this group is considered to be "handicapped"). Fourteen families have children who do not have identified special educational needs (this group is not considered to be "handicapped"). Information was obtained through a lengthy, semi-structured interview process. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and ranged in length from 3 to 8 hours.

The investigation attempted to shed light in the following areas:

1. The quality and quantity of stresses which impinge upon the two groups of families

2. The quality and quantity of coping strategies which are utilized by the two groups of families in an effort to deal with their stresses

3. The similarities and differences which exist in the two groups of families relative to the stresses, the coping strategies, the the type of family (Handicapped or Non-Handicapped).

## IV. Conclusions

Major conclusions obtained by the findings of the study are summarized below.

1. The immediate and extended family relationships among most of the families were found to be generally strong and caring. Parenting and maintenance of the family were highly valued, as was an emphasis on the traditional sexually-defined roles. Membership in a family was considered to be important, and this membership made each person special. The extended family, including grandparents, aunts and uncles, co-parents, and other relatives was felt to enrich the individual. The value of establishing and maintaining a family was stressed during the childhood years. Roles in which the wife was the mother and homemaker, and the husband the breadwinner were perceived as ideal.

The families from both groups drew much of their sense of identity and support from their immediate and extended families, although community involvement and maintenance of goodwill among neighbors was also important. Most of the families participated in neighborhood activities and had a sense of community. However, they did not count on the support of outsiders during times of stress. When relatives did not help in times of need, families felt isolated and deprived of an important cultural link because the family's responsibility for helping relatives in need is emphasized by the cultural value system. Isolation from family members was more frequently reported by families in the Handicapped Group.

Members of the Handicapped Group were more disillusioned with marriage, childrearing, and parenting roles. For this group of families, family life seemed to be less satisfying and more difficult. Strain in the spousal relationship, the parental relationship, and the relationships with extended family members occurred more frequently among the Handicapped Group families.

2. A difference concerning the number and variety of needs and stresses was found among the two groups of families. The families having children with identified handicaps reported nearly five times as many stresses, stemming from a wider variey of sources, than did families whose children were not identified as handicapped. Most frequently reported as stressful for the Handicapped Group were the following (listed in the order of frequency): (1) awareness of their child's deficits, (2) serious illness, (3) finances, (4) housing, (5) child care, (6) employment problems, and, (7) English language skills. The areas of stress which were most frequently reported by families of children who were not handicapped include the following (again, in the order of frequency): (1) English language skills, (2) serious illness, (3) housing, (4) finances, and, (5) employment.

3. The sources of support which were drawn by the families in the two groups differed While all the families obtained some degree of help from personal-level and immediate-and extended-family systems. The

families who had handicapped children drew more of their support from the community resources. Problems presented by the handicap prompted the families to seek out more avenues of direct or backup support such as special education programs in the schools or welfare subsidization.

Thus, families who had handicapped children were knowledgeable about and were involved with a greater number of community-level resources. On the other hand, families without handicapped children had far less recourse to community agencies, and tended to depend more extensively on their own personal or family resources for support. These latter resources were not nearly as available to families within the Handicapped Group because relationships in their immediate and extended-family systems were generally less integrated and more problematic. The strain of rearing children with handicaps was in most cases considerable and ongoing. This stress infiltrated the family system in a negative way in most cases, thus interfering with the quality of family functioning. However, the dynamics of many individual families differed. Some families mustered strength from various levels and functioned commendably in spite of many stresses and burdens. Other families, in spite of a rather strong base of family and personal support, did not function well.

4. The employment status of the adults in the families was a crucial factor affecting the families' functioning. In families with handicapped children, the wife frequently was unable to work outside the home because of the demands of looking after a handicapped child. On the other hand, many wives in the Non-Handicapped Group did work. In families where one or both spouses worked regularly, the family functioned better, housing was more satisfactory, finances were less of a stress, and more material resources and services --such as telephones and private transportation -- were available to help the family cope with stresses. There was also, in these two-working-parent families, less need for dependence on welfare subsidies, which were universally considered as a last resort measure, whether or not families were involved in the program. Families expressed their preference for earning their livelihoods by working. However, employment was not always possible for a variety of reasons among which were the need to care for young or handicapped children, insufficient education and skills, and language barriers.

All families expressed a desire to be better educated. Whether or not husband and/or wife were currently employed, improvement in education was perceived to be a viable avenue toward better employment. This was not a surprising finding because a basic reason for the families' move to the mainland was to improve their economic status.

5. The adequacy of and satisfaction with their housing was a key factor in the families' better negotiation with many of their stresses. Generally, families who lived in well-maintained, affordable, and conveniently located dwellings had a richer and more satisfying lifestyle. In these particular housing situations, children were allowed to play outside and parents felt that their children were safely away from "street dangers" present in many urban neighborhoods.

Families who lived in the more satisfactory housing units were not constantly concerned about the high cost of utilities, the neglect of the property, or the lack of space.

Most satisfied were the families who lived in community-controlled government-subsidized units where the neighborhood was predominantly Puerto Rican. A surprising finding concerning the housing status was that a majority of the families of handicapped children had the most inadequate housing and were least satisfied with it. Many in this group were and had been actively seeking more appropriate dwellings but experienced difficulties in finding them.

6. Families from both groups were similar with regard to several personality attributes about which they were questioned. Spouses in both groups of families rated themselves as hard-working, independent, organized, and ambitious. However, a difference between groups was found in regard to future orientation. Families of children who did not have handicaps were more future-oriented. For these families, long-range goals were important. On the other hand, families who were rearing handicapped children found that long-range planning was not meaningful or effective. Many of the families in this group were burdened with managing the present, day-to-day family events.

7. Contact with relatives on the Island was found to be an important dimension for many of the families. It was found that the families with more extensive and personal ties to Puerto Rico-based relatives seemed to function better on the mainland. Visits, vacations, letter and telephone communication with Island relatives strengthened the sense of family identity, cultural awareness, and national pride.

Families from both groups differed as to the extent of contact maintained with relatives on the Island. Although the average length of time spent in the mainland was similar (about 11 years) for all the families, the group whose children did not have identified handicaps communicated regularly and kept in close touch with relatives in Puerto Rico. This was not generally the case with families who had handicapped children.

8. A surprising finding concerning contact with Island family members was the number of well-functioning families who harbored the notion of returning to Puerto Rico at some point in their lives. Few families that were rearing handicapped children expressed a desire to return to Puerto Rico. Families in this group generally maintained only minimal contact with Island relatives and did not plan to return because they needed special education services for their child. This service was usually available in the mainland and typically not on the Island.

9. Most of the families felt that a minimum amount of contact with their children's schools was best. Frequent visits to the schools suggested, to them, the existence of problems or potential problems with their children. In terms of contact with the schools, there was a

marked difference between the two groups. Parents of handicapped children were asked to attend conferences to discuss the special education placements and programs of their children. These parents were asked to come to the schools much more frequently than parents whose children did not have identified handicaps or who were in regular education programs. Most of the parents maintained a passive stance and sustained an implicit and explicit trust in the school and school staff.

Tables 4 and 5, summarize the major conclusions of the study.

## V. Implications for Practice, Policy, and Special Education

Major implications drawn from the findings of the study involve the following:

That Hispanic families would profit from supportive intervention which focuses on casual and flexible personal relationships. Families want to feel that help is available with a minimum of bureaucratic red tape. Counseling support, for example, should include practical strategies. Examples of these systems-related supportive measures include help for the families in arranging telephone service, sharing accurate information about resource services, facilitating the pursuit of educational and vocational goals through instruction and demonstration of application procedures. It is crucial that agencies integrate the precipitating factors which lead a family to the agencies, with effective intervention and then with follow-up monitoring. For Hispanic families it is not sufficient to diagnose and recommend solutions. Direct participation in the helping process through the attainment of goals is required.

Because the Hispanic derives a strong sense of personal worth through direct personal relationships, it behooves service providers to capitalize on this important cultural value. Thus, long-term rather than short-term projects should be undertaken. Programs which are funded for short periods of time establish a pattern of disjointed, piecemeal strategies which often terminate when the fiscal year ends. When funds run out, new staff is employed, new policies implemented, and personal relationships are broken. Funded projects which aim to intervene in certain areas of need for Puerto Rican families must provide for follow-up and continued personal contact. It would be extremely useful to provide for the training of families so that they can themselves recognize the gradient of problems which they must face regarding their handicapped children. Often, a seriously handicapped child is not helped early enough because the parents have little basis on which to judge the seriousness of the problem. Conversely, parents sometimes overreact to maturational and developmental issues about their children. In this latter case, premature and often ineffective decisions are made. Information exchanges, follow-up, and consistent contact with Hispanic families about the nature of their children's development should be easily available or facilitated by profesionals.

Table 4

Generalized Summary of Similarities among Two Groups of Families

1. Strong sense of identity as Hispanic/Puerto Rican
2. Strong sense of membership in family
3. Strong "caring" element among nuclear family members
4. Prefer a personal relationship in community agency involvement
5. Economic stresses forceful
6. Desire to be better educated
7. Prefer infrequent contact with schools
8. Parenting function of family stressed
9. Traditional view of sex roles
10. Resistant to idea of institutionalizing handicapped family members
11. Overburdened feeling, compared to others
12. Personality attributes similar concerning industriousness, independence, organization
13. Length of residency in mainland (11 years)

Table 5

Generalized Summary of Differences between Two Types of Families

| Non-Handicapped Group | Handicapped Group |
|---|---|
| 1. Smaller number of stresses. | 1. More stresses. |
| 2. Less varied kinds of stresses. | 2. Wider variety of stresses. |
| 3. Housing better; more satisfaction with housing. | 3. Housing less adequate; less satisfaction with housing. |
| 4. Less reliance on community-level support:<br>a. less participation in welfare<br>b. infrequent contact with children's schools<br>c. limited knowledge and use of community agencies. | 4. More reliance on community-level support:<br>a. more involvement with welfare<br>b. frequent contact with children's schools<br>c. good knowledge and use of community agencies. |
| 5. More reliance on personal- and family-level support. | 5. Less reliance on personal- and family-level support. |
| 6. Better immediate- and extended-family relationships. | 6. More stressful immediate- and extended-family relationships. |
| 7. Regular and frequent contact/communication with Puerto Rico-based relatives. | 7. Minimal contact with Puerto Rico-based relatives. |
| 8. Plans to return to Puerto Rico. | 8. No plans to return to Puerto Rico. |

My findings indicate that parents strive to maintain a passive, minimally-active relationship with their children's schools. Frequent visits and contact with school staff were perceived as indicative of problems with their children. Thus, most of the families adhere to an implicit model with relation to the schools which incorporates the "no news is good news" idea. Schools are generally trusted and are held to be infallible. Little overall family involvement with the schools occurs, but this is not only a result of cultural values. Often the schools make very little effort to encourage Hispanic parents' participation in their children's schools. Bilingual peronnel, Spanish translations of notices, and otherwise active outreach to the Puerto Rican family are, in most cases, not the rule but the exception. Meaningful outreach to parents is mandatory in schools attended by Hispanic children.

Families feel that the schools need to educate and provide meaningful experiences for their children's future. The basic skills are felt to be important ones for the schools to emphasize. The families expressed their concern about their children's slow progress in school. Schools should establish solid educational curricula with an emphasis on basic skills and practical learning experiences.

When the language barriers between parent and school are somewhat overcome, it often happens that the parents do not respond. This reaction is surprising to well-intentioned educators. However, parents' casualness relative to the school and school staff often is the case becuase messages, notices, or letters from the school are cold and impersonal. However, if direct overtures, such as telephone calls are made to the family by the school staff, then reciprocity, cooperation, and goodwill often result. When the Puerto Rican parent is positively involved with the schools, it is usually because of a direct and personal relationship what exists with a person from the school. Again, the aspect of the personal relationship (advocate, friend, intermediary) is extremelly important. Community liaisons and school-home workers should be available as intermediaries, messengers, and family advocates.

Many of the families were not fully aware of the type of programs which their children attended. Most of the families interviewed in the study seemed to believe that their children were involved in a bilingual program, whether or not this was true. Often parents assumed that if bilingual aides, secretaries, or Spanish-speaking personnel worked in the schools, then the children were in a bilingual program. Further, many families were only minimally aware of different possibilities and options concerning bilingual or monolingual school programs. Families often had little basis of comparison for the types of classes available for their children in the schools. Little opportunity or motivation to investigate occurred if their children learned to read, participated with other children, and otherwise developed well.

Parents should be provided with ample opportunities to observe and learn about the options available for their children in the schools.

Description of programs, explanation of entry procedures, and information about possible alternatives in education should be clearly communicated to parents in language which they can understand. Visits to schools and observation of programs should be encouraged and facilitated.

Special Education

The following section specifies issues concerning the Hispanic family's involvement with special education programs.

Many parents became appropriately concerned when their children did not read or appear to learn after several years of schooling. Special educational programs were then called into play. A new set of variables entered the picture of the Puerto Rican family's relationship with their children's schools. Active participation with the schools was now required, and this involvement was counterindicated by the more passive, culturally-sanctioned value system. Puerto Rican families' participation in the special education programs of their children was a stressful process.

As is usually the case in the general population of families who have handicapped children, Puerto Rican families who had handicapped children were generally adversely affected. Marital, social, employment, and other roles were strained. It was generally true that the direction of most of the families' energy was geared to the handicapped child. The family's eventual negotiation with the educational needs of their handicapped child is another area of stress. What programs are available? What is the entry process? Will their child be provided with appropriate education? What special education programs are available to the children of Puerto Rican families?

Special education programs for Hispanic children, in a great many cases, represented a compromise. For the families, it was often a choice of a special program or a bilingual program when actually both were needed. For the very handicapped child who required a more specialized environment, there was usually no choice at all. It was, in this case, the option of a specialized program without regard to the child's appropriate functional language, or no program at all!!!! Families were often trapped into settling for the available specialized setting, for want of anything else.

For the Hispanic child who is severely mentally, physically, linguistically, or emotionally handicapped, the opportunity to participate in adequate education is limited for the most part. The red tape requirements for entry and the amount of time lost during this pre-entry process are often extreme. Yet, the early intervention for children whose handicaps are severe is critical.

For Hispanic children whose handicaps are severe, the aspect of primary language maintenance is additionally important, yet it is the one variable which is most often overlooked, most expendable, and most

quickly eliminated from consideration. Those children whose handicaps are severe are the very ones who most need the nurturing from the family and in the family's primary language. Yet, the severely-handicapped child is the child who, in many cases, is denied a bilingual experience. The budget planners and the social implementers emphasize the low incidence of Hispanic children with special needs as the ultimate reason for the limited availability of adequate special programs. In the midst of the pressures from the schools and the community, the parents of children with special needs often succumb and accept what they get.

Families of handicapped children are in critical need of community support. For these families, a wide range of supportive intervention measures is necessary in order that they be able to better cope with the many stresses of rearing their handicapped child in addition to maintaining a healthy family life. The folowing are but a few suggestions which would be very useful:

1. Provision of "respite care" for mothers and families of handicapped children, in order to relieve, at least temporarily, the family's constant level of stress brought about because of ongoing, non-stop concern and care for the handicapped child.

2. Child care or day care for handicapped children, in order to allow mother to work, thus alleviating financial distress and all its ramifications.

3. Provision of after school and weekend programs for handicapped children.

4. Provision of transportation to and from school, and to and from after-school and extracurricular activities for the child. Also, accessible transportation for parents who visit their children's school for conferences or observations.

Many urban communities have begun to respond to some pressure from the Puerto Rican community. Boston has developed and begun to offer special education services, in addition to some supportive bilingual special education intervention alternatives. But, progress has been slow, expensive, and limited. The parents and the community have often not demanded enough. As a result, the schools have not provided enough.

Concerning special education intervention programs for Hispanics, the question is no longer, what programs are needed? as where are the needed programs and services? Also, when will such services be available? The status quo for Puerto Ricans in the areas of special education and other intervention programs for handicapped members needs to be advanced. This can be done by enriching existing programs, establishing additional classes, and facilitating access to these programs. Stronger and more forceful community and advocacy group participation by the Hispanic population is essential if school administrators, school committees, and legislators are to be convinced

of and clearly accept the fact that more and better special education services are needed for Hispanics.